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FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7286  
INFO RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 1469  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 2374  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 6074  
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI 2880  
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE 8484  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 000316

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/09/2030

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [IN](#) [PK](#)

SUBJECT: PAKISTAN APPEARS LIKELY TO ACCEPT INDIA'S OFFER OF  
FOREIGN SECRETARY TALKS, BUT WANTS TO RESUME COMPOSITE  
DIALOGUE

REF: NEW DELHI 0161

Classified By: Gerald M. Feierstein, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: MFA Director General for South Asia Afrasiab Mehdi Hashim told Deputy PolCouns on February 9 that Pakistan has not yet accepted India's offer of a bilateral foreign secretary-level meeting, but expected it would do so. Though the Indians have said they are open to discussion of all issues at the meeting, Afrasiab maintained that little progress can be made in such a venue. Only the Composite Dialogue has a structure for achieving results, he argued. Afrasiab said there will be a meeting between Interior Minister Malik and Home Minister Chidambaram on the margins of the upcoming SAARC meeting in Islamabad. He claimed that, regardless of what the Indians say publicly, they have expressed appreciation in private for Pakistan's steps to bring the Mumbai perpetrators to justice. He dismissed the significance of recent ceasefire violations along Kashmir's Line of Control and the Indo-Pak border in Punjab. End Summary.

¶2. (C) MFA Director General for South Asia Afrasiab Mehdi Hashim told Deputy PolCouns on February 9 that the Pakistani government has not yet made a decision regarding whether to accept India's offer of a bilateral, foreign secretary-level meeting in New Delhi in the coming weeks. The sticking point is that India has agreed only to a meeting, not to the resumption of the Composite Dialogue. Afrasiab explained that, in the end, Pakistan would likely agree to the foreign secretaries' meeting, especially because its failure to do so would concede the high ground to the Indians, allowing them to claim to the international community that Pakistan, not India, is the stumbling block to bilateral dialogue.

¶3. (C) Afrasiab pointed out that Pakistan and India have, in fact, continued to meet at high levels since India suspended the Composite Dialogue after the November 2008 Mumbai attack. This includes a foreign secretary-level meeting in February 2009 at a South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) gathering in Colombo; President Zardari's meeting with Prime Minister Singh in June 2009 following the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in Yekaterinburg; foreign secretary and prime minister meetings in July 2009 at the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) summit in Sharm El-Sheikh; and foreign secretary and foreign minister meetings in September 2009 on the margins of UNGA in New York. Afrasiab thus argued that India's offer of a foreign secretaries' meeting

in New Delhi does not, in fact, represent a major step forward on India's part.

¶4. (C) Afrasiab acknowledged that the Indians have expressed a willingness to discuss all issues, not just counter-terrorism, at the foreign secretaries' meeting. However, he claimed that little progress can be made at such a meeting, "which would amount to a few hours of discussion followed by a press conference." Rather, Afrasiab insisted that only the Composite Dialogue provides a structure -- eight baskets of issues (peace and security, Jammu and Kashmir, terrorism and drugs, people-to-people exchanges, the Wullar Barrage, Sir Creek, Siachen Glacier) with negotiations on each led individually by the relevant ministries and agencies -- that can achieve results. He argued that Pakistan is a "small" country and India a large one, and thus the Indians should be magnanimous and cease holding resumption of the Composite Dialogue "hostage" to the Mumbai case.

¶5. (C) Afrasiab said that he did expect there will be a meeting between Pakistani Interior Minister Malik and Indian Home Minister Chidambaram on the margins of the upcoming SAARC meeting in Islamabad. However, he explained that, at Nepal's request, the SAARC meeting had been postponed yet again, this time from February 24-27 to sometime in late March.

¶6. (C) Deputy PolCouns asked Afrasiab about India's claims that Pakistan has not taken sufficient action in response to the Mumbai attack. Afrasiab said that regardless of what the

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Indians have said in public, they have appreciated expression in private for Pakistan's steps to bring the Mumbai perpetrators to justice. The Mumbai trial is proceeding, even if it is moving at a slow pace "because the courts take their own time." Deputy PolCouns asked whether Pakistan could do more to dismantle the infrastructure of Lashkar-e-Tayiba (LeT)/Jama'at-ud-Dawa (JuD). Afrasiab responded that Pakistan is "breaking" under the weight of terrorist attacks, and can only tackle so much of the terrorism problem at one time.

¶7. (C) Deputy PolCouns noted that there have been reports in recent weeks about an increase in ceasefire violations across of the Line of Control (LOC) in Kashmir and along the Indo-Pak border in Punjab. Afrasiab conceded that there have been several incidents, but he did not attribute any significance to them. He explained that there is an established mechanism of communication between the two countries' Directors General of Military Operations (DGMOs) to review ceasefire violations.

¶8. (C) Comment: Consistent with our past interactions with Afrasiab, he was in character in putting a negative spin on India's offer. Our sense is that, while the Pakistanis are disappointed that India has not offered to resume the Composite Dialogue, many officials do recognize that this is a step forward on India's part, since there is a difference between what has occurred over the past year - i.e., high-level meetings on the margins of other events in third countries -- and an offer of a meeting in New Delhi. Several Pakistani politicians have, in fact, thanked us for the Indian offer, believing that it came about as a result of U.S. pressure, including from Secretary Gates during his visit to New Delhi.

¶9. (C) Comment Continued: The Pakistanis have repeatedly pressed us and our high-level visitors, including Secretary Clinton and SRAP Ambassador Holbrooke, for U.S. intervention in getting the Indians to resume the Composite Dialogue as well as the more important backchannel -- which has apparently met only once in recent months. We understand that the Indians face domestic political constraints in resuming discussions in these fora in the absence of further

action by Pakistan against LeT/JuD, but Pakistan has its own political and practical constraints in dismantling the LeT/JuD infrastructure. The prosecution -- and, hopefully, conviction -- of the current Mumbai defendants is likely the most the Pakistanis can realistically achieve. If the two sides are able to overcome their differences and resume the Composite Dialogue and backchannel, there may be prospects for real progress. The Pakistanis have stressed that they want to resume the backchannel from the point where Musharraf-era talks broke off in 2007 -- which is consistent with the Indian view as relayed to Ambassador Holbrooke by Prime Minister Singh during their January 18 meeting in New Delhi (reftel).  
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